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SUBJECT: ECUADOR CELEBRATES WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOR

REF: QUITO 335

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Government of Ecuador (GOE) marked the 2007 World Day Against Child Labor by organizing a conference focused primarily on presenting basic information, highlighting successes, and enlisting support for future efforts. This event at the Ministry of Agriculture focused primarily on agricultural child labor, raising concerns that the Ministry of Labor is not assuming its responsibility to lead GOE efforts to eliminate child labor by 2020.
End Summary.

FORMAT/ATMOSPHERICS

¶2. (U) Approximately 100 people from the GOE, the international community and NGOs participated on June 12 in a conference marking World Day Against Child Labor. The conference, subtitled "Agriculture Free of Child Labor: The Future Harvest," was hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture. The conference began with a video presentation, followed by a slideshow summary of Ecuadorian child labor statistics, and concluded with speeches from representatives of government, UN, and labor organizations involved in Ecuador's efforts to eliminate child labor. A detailed information packet was also given to all members of the audience.

INFORMING THE PUBLIC

¶3. (U) The video presentation, slideshow summary, and first speeches were very general and focused on defining child labor and giving the basic facts of Ecuador's child labor situation. GOE officials confirmed that 662,664 children in Ecuador are participating in exploitative child labor in 2007. Of these, 60.4% work in agriculture, predominantly on banana and flower plantations. These statistics do not include children who legitimately work for their families or in a non-exploitative environment.

¶4. (U) Speakers generally emphasized the health and safety concerns of children working in agriculture. They also emphasized that child labor reinforces the cycle of rural poverty by preventing children from attending schools to receive education. Eliminating child labor is recognized as essential to Ecuador's long-term social and economic development.

PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE, BUT THE WORK IS NOT YET DONE

¶5. (U) ILO representative Cesar Mosquera and Bolivar Cevallos, President of the Flower Exporters Association, highlighted successes in reducing the numbers of child laborers and in organizing government and civil society to fight against child labor. ILO's 2007 statistics show the number of exploited child laborers has fallen by 116,336 children since 2001. They pointed to initiatives

to certify businesses as being free of child labor.

¶6. (U) Speakers emphasized the need for continued coordinated, integrated action among government, civil society, business, and labor organizations to successfully fight child labor. Several speakers framed the resolution of the child labor issue as a moral and patriotic imperative in their calls to action. Minister of Agriculture Carlos Vallejo and Ministry of Labor representative Leonardo Chiriboga emphasized the ongoing and existing coordination efforts among government agencies, but made no mention of any new specific GOE initiatives.

COMMENT

¶6. (U) Though general in scope and tone, the conference was the GOE's first serious attempt to address the issue of child labor in a coordinated public fashion since President Correa took office. The wide participation of government, civil society, and labor organizations in the conference demonstrated growing public and private sector interest in attacking the problem.

¶7. (SBU) The conference was a good opportunity for the child labor community to provide information and marshal support for the struggle to eliminate remaining child labor in Ecuador. It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Agriculture hosted the event rather than the Ministry of Labor. While Minister of Labor Antonio Gagliardo (who chose not attend the event) recognizes the importance of combating child labor (reftel), his ministry is not actively leading GOE efforts to combat the problem. We will share our concerns that participation of the Ministry of Labor remains crucial to a truly successful effort to combat child labor.

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